



Origins of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary



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In the late 1980s, the Florida Keys were facing the threats of oil drilling and deteriorating water quality, as well as coral bleaching, the loss of living coral cover on reefs, a major seagrass die-off, declines of reef fish populations, and the spread of coral diseases. The final insult was three groundings of large ships on the reef tract within 18 days in the fall of 1989.

In recognition of these issues, former President Bush signed into law the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Protection Act on November 16, 1990. The Act immediately addressed two major concerns. It prohibited any oil drilling, including mineral and hydrocarbon leasing, exploration, development or production within the Sanctuary, and it prohibited the operation of tank vessels and vessels greater than 50 meters in length in an internationally recognized "Area-to-be Avoided." Congress, recognizing the critical role of water quality in maintaining Sanctuary resources, directed the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to work with the Governor of the State of Florida and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to develop a comprehensive Water Quality Protection Program for the Sanctuary. The Act also called for the Department of Commerce to work with the appropriate federal, state and local government entities and a citizen Sanctuary Advisory Council to develop a management plan and implement regulations to protect and preserve the resources of the Florida Keys marine environment.

Since approximately 65% of the Sanctuary lies in state waters, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the State of Florida established a partnership to manage Sanctuary resources. Due to the high level and diversity of public use of the resources in the Florida Keys and the importance of tourism to the economy of the Keys, it was equally important that the public have a strong role in development of the comprehensive management plan for the Sanctuary. Sanctuary staff established an interagency working group that included representatives of the various federal, state and local agencies responsible for protecting and managing the resources. This group, known as the Core Group, included scientists as well as managers. At the same time, the first Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) was established. This citizens advisory group included representatives of the fishing and diving industry, the environmental community, the general public, and the research and education communities.

The Sanctuary staff, with the advice of the SAC, developed a final management plan that reflects the broad range of public comments and recognizes the importance of resource protection to the economy of the Florida Keys. Zoning was established, creating 23 no-take areas, 27 Wildlife Management Areas and including other Marine Protected Areas in the FKNMS. The FKNMS final management plan and regulations became effective July 1, 1997.

FKNMS is one of thirteen National Marine Sanctuaries designated to promote comprehensive management of their special conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, research, educational or aesthetic resources. The FKNMS includes the only living barrier coral reef ecosystem in the continental United States.

For more information, see map on next page and visit: floridakeys.noaa.gov/welcometo.html and floridakeys.noaa.gov/regs/5yearreview/.

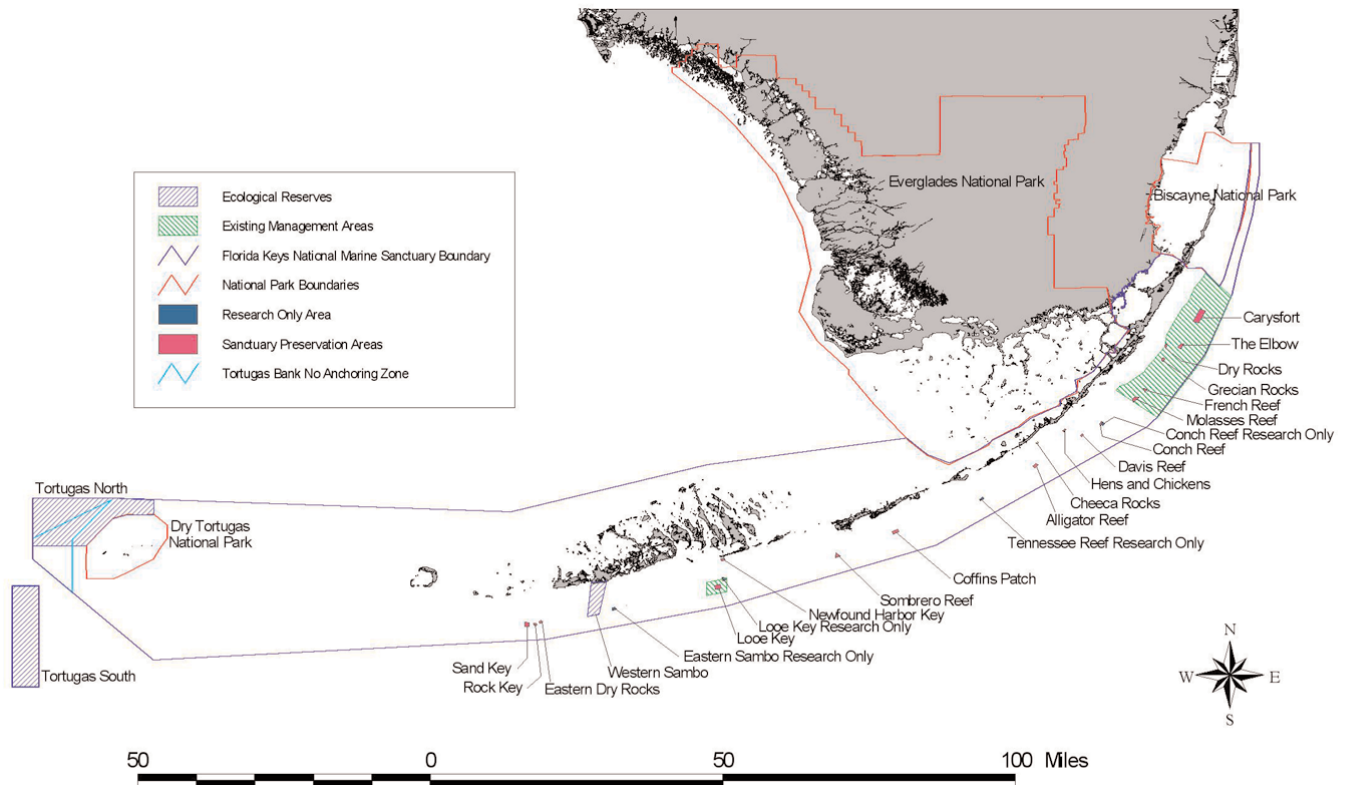
Note: This article appeared in the Winter 2000 issue of the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Sounding Line.

Did you know?

***The Key Largo National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1975 and the Looe Key National Marine Sanctuary was designated in 1981. Today, both are included as existing management areas within the over 2900 square nautical mile Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.**

***On December 4, 2000, President William J. Clinton announced the creation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Ecosystem Reserve.**

***The wreck of the civil war vessel the USS Monitor off the coast of North Carolina is the site of the nation's first National Marine Sanctuary, established in January 1975.**



website: floridaKeys.noaa.gov